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Exploration and Discovery

THE FIRST SEASON OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO EGYPTIAN EXPEDITION

Those readers of the *Biblical World* who several years since may have noticed an account of the colossal catastrophe in the great hall of columns at Karnak, may have thought further and surmised that other ancient buildings in Egypt are also rapidly nearing ruin. It is not so long ago that geologists were interested in, and apparently aware of, only the history of the earth in past ages, not being conscious that geological processes have never stopped and are going on without cessation at the present day. It is much the same with the survival of ancient buildings. We look upon them in their massive solidity, unconscious that the processes of decay which have made them ruins have never ceased to work, and never will. Throughout Egypt the great buildings which are the admiration of the modern tourist world, are daily nearing their final destruction. Sometimes it is only a chip falling from the surface, carrying with it some precious sign, the lack of which will be the despair of the future decipherer or copyist; again it is an entire block, which may be carried off by a native dealer in antiquities; or, sometimes, as at Karnak, it is a whole colonnade which crashes down to ruin. The sum-total of such disasters in the course of a century is great. Yet comparatively few of the monumental records of Egypt have ever found publication by modern methods in a form adequate to preserve them for future study.

If this is true of Egypt, it is more especially true of Nubia, Egypt's upper river province. As far back as the Old Kingdom, the pyramid age, Egypt began to absorb the Nile country above the first cataract. What was but a loose control in the Old Kingdom rapidly tightened into complete possession and administration in the Twelfth Dynasty, about two thousand B. C. From this vantage-ground, as the Empire arose into power, the great imperial Pharaohs pushed the conquest southward and established the frontier of Egyptian government at the fourth cataract of the Nile. Here it remained for many centuries. The country administered by the Pharaoh's officials was rapidly Egyptianized. Temples rivaling those of the Egyptian cities in splendor arose at many points along the Nubian Nile, and for purposes of government and commerce with the farther south Nubia was essentially Egyptian. The first cataract abounds with inscriptions left there by the Pharaoh's administrative

officials hurrying to and fro on the business of the Nubian government, of which they desired to leave some record as they passed back and forth. It is a land of records, of documents, material and written. On the cliffs which inclose the valley on east and west the names of Egyptian officers are common, and undoubtedly a large number of such inscriptions, some of them of considerable importance, are still to be discovered in these regions. But it is especially the temples of lower Nubia, which, daily falling to ruin, have long awaited any adequate record. It was therefore the purpose of the University of Chicago Egyptian Expedition to lay out a program for working through a certain portion of this region, with the intention of making an exhaustive record of all the temples included in it. The region between the first two cataracts of the Nile is very clearly defined, being about two hundred miles of the Nubian Nile valley as included by the two cataracts. This was the scene of the Expedition's operations during the past winter. It was the intention to complete during the season all the pre-Ptolemaic temples surviving in it. This program was carried out by the Expedition to completion, and its papers now contain a full archaeological and epigraphic survey of the temples mentioned.

The first work was done at the foot of the second cataract, where Kitchener's military railway branches from the Nile and crosses the desert to Khartum. Here there is a beautiful temple of the best period of the Empire, from which absolutely nothing has ever been published, except a few brief fragments once printed in a journal by Sayce. Alongside it is a Twelfth Dynasty temple of the Abrahamic age. All the inscriptions and reliefs in these buildings were exhaustively copied and photographed. A few intermediate ruins of less importance occupied the Expedition until it reached the most extensive monument in Nubia, the vast temple of Abu Simbel, with its adjacent buildings and records. It is hewn out of the rock-face of the cliffs, and its facade is flanked by four colossal statues of Ramses II, the builder, seventy-two feet high. The hall behind these statues is forty feet high and sixty feet long, the ceiling being supported by eight huge pillars, each engaging in a colossal statue of the king, Ramses II. On the north wall of this great hall is an immense expanse of relief scenes depicting the battle of Kadesh and Ramses II's victory over the Hittites there. Other important monuments abound; just south of the entrance is an enormous stela, with a long inscription erected in honor of Ramses II's marriage with the daughter of the king of the Hittites. A score of stelæ of varying importance are distributed along the face of the cliff north and south of the temple. A chapel of one hall is excavated just south of it, and a large temple of Hathor is a few hundred feet to the north.

Here was a field of operations for many weeks. On the arrival of the Expedition there was graphic evidence of the necessity of such work. A huge piece from the main architrave of the great hall, weighing tons, had fallen from the ceiling to the floor not long before our arrival. One of the colossi of Ramses II before the entrance is already down, and the upper part of a second is slowly shifting down an oblique crack from the shoulders to the knees. It is likely to collapse at any time. The smaller statues of the king's family on the front are losing some portions constantly, and within the last year or two one of the princesses has lost her face. The plan of work was better illustrated in this temple than anywhere else. It involved the photographing on a large scale of every important inscription and relief at the place. Whenever an inscription was of great size, its surface was divided into rectangles, and it was photographed in sections. The negatives were developed on the spot and prints furnished. These were then taken to the scaffolding and collated with the wall; for the eye of the Egyptologist, using varying lights and understanding the content of the inscription, sees more than the lens of the camera. Upon the photographic print, in colored inks, were entered all additional signs or readings discerned by the Egyptologist on the wall. The shifting of scaffolding and measurement of the temple for ground-plans and elevations kept our engineer occupied; while the photographer was held constantly at work furnishing the Director with the necessary prints for collation on the wall. This work of collation, the constant laying-out of new work, and the records of of the Expedition kept the Director more than busy. The task of completing this enormous temple seemed during the first two or three days so colossal that it was quite overwhelming. Gradually, however, as the work was systematized and laid out piece by piece, and the tall scaffoldings for the great camera rose and descended day by day, we moved slowly across the walls, till at last the end was in sight. The entire great temple, all the adjacent buildings, and every inscription in the neighborhood were exhaustively photographed on the above plan. Occasionally a monument was so weathered that the camera was insufficient, and it must be copied with the pen in facsimile, involving long and weary days on the scaffolding. Naturally during so exhaustive an examination of the walls of such a building many discoveries were made: some of them of interest only to the technical archæologist, others of wider import. Of these it is impossible to speak here. Suffice it to say that the great halls of the temple of Abu Simbel may now come crashing down when they will, the place has nevertheless been saved for science and will be accessible ere long in the chief libraries of the world.

At Kasr Ibrim, below Abu Simbel, we found among other, known monuments a hitherto unnoticed record of the imperial tribute of Nubia to the Pharaoh in the Eighteenth Dynasty. The record is of great interest, and establishes for the first time an approximate estimate of the tribute of the country under the Empire. It had been necessary at several points during the work of the Expedition to clear the walls of débris in order to gain access to the inscriptions. When the Expedition reached Amada, however, it was found necessary to excavate the first hall, which lay two meters deep under rubbish. This was the most important excavation conducted by the Expedition. It brought to light a number of monuments as yet unknown, and a series of new inscriptions were discovered on the lower parts of the walls. Among other things, there was found the pyramid of a new viceroy of Nubia. Artistically speaking, Amada is quite the most beautiful temple in which the Expedition worked. It has none of the impressiveness due to the vast dimensions of the Abu Simbel temple, but its sculptures from the best age of the Empire are superb. Moreover, the walls were covered with stucco or Nile mud by the Copts in the Christian ages in order to use the place as a church; and this accident has resulted in marvelous preservation of the painted surface of the reliefs on the walls. In the rear rooms we cleared off this stucco, and found some superb paintings, as bright and fresh as on the day when they were executed. This made me very much regret that the Expedition did not possess a water-color artist who could have recorded them in color. But even in large-scale photographs some idea of their freshness and beauty, of their grace and fine precision, may be gained. It is impossible here to go into the detail of work, as the Expedition passed from temple to temple. Suffice it to say that the completed material brought back by the Expedition now contains all the pre-Ptolemaic temples between the first two cataracts, except the sand-covered temple of Sebû'a which contains practically no inscriptions. The whole will be published in a series of folio volumes, and, it is hoped, will serve as the standard sources for these fast-vanishing monuments of the upper Nile.

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